



Halloween costumes can scare up trouble for your pet

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MADISON – Whether fashionable or frightening, there are thousands of costumes for your furry dog or feline friend, but animal officials warn that pet costumes may scare up more problems than you anticipated.

“Some pets have temperaments that will tolerate our desire to dress them up in costumes, but many prefer their birthday suits,” says Dr. Yvonne Bellay, Animal Welfare Program Manager for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection. “Putting them in costumes can cause undue stress for the animal, not to mention dangers that you may not immediately think of like allergies or choking.”

Before making the decision to dress up your pet for Halloween, consider some of these important points:

- Make sure the costume isn't annoying or unsafe. It should not restrict the animal's movement or hearing, or impede his ability to breathe, bark or meow. If a pet costume comes with a mask, don't use it. While some dogs will love dressing up, they usually aren't too keen on masks. If you absolutely must use a mask on your pet, make sure that the eyeholes have plenty of room to see and that there is nothing covering the nose or confining the mouth.
- Try on costumes before the big night. If your pet seems distressed, allergic or shows abnormal behavior, consider letting him go au naturel or donning a festive bandana.
- Take a close look at your pet's costume and make sure it does not have small, dangling or easily chewed-off pieces that he could choke on. Also, ill-fitting outfits can get twisted on external objects or your pet, leading to injury.

Aside from the costume dangers, Halloween presents a number of other potential hazards for your animal. Try to avoid some of these scary possibilities:

- As much as your pet begs for some of your candy, don't give in or leave the candy where the animal can easily access it. Chocolate, perhaps the most traditional of the snacks doled out on Halloween, is toxic to pets and can cause seizures and increased heart rate.
- Candy wrappers, such as tin foil, can get stuck in your pet's digestive tract and make them ill or cause death.
- Don't leave lit candles or Jack-O-Lanterns where they can be knocked over by a swinging tail or by a curious cat. Not only could your pet start a fire but they could severely burn themselves in the process.
- Being around a bunch of people that the animal does not know can be very stressful, so if you are having an indoor party or will be opening the door frequently to hand out candy, make sure that you put your dog or cat in a room where they won't be disturbed. Even if your pet is ultra-friendly and doesn't mind loud noises, music and lots of people you should keep them separate for the night.
- Be careful your cat or dog doesn't dart out through an open door as you hand out candy. Your best bet is to just put them in a room with some food and water for the night and check on them once in a while to let them know everything is fine.

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